Suffering the Silence:

One Teacher's Experience Working with Writers Workshop

by

Rebecca S. Edgar

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First Reader, Dr. Rose Casement Dr. Rose Casement

Second Reader, Dr. Pat Gallant Dr. Patricia A. Gallant

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APPENDIXES

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN – FLINT

January 15, 2004

To: Rose Casement

From: Suzanne Selig, Chair, Human Subjects Committee

Re: Writer's Workshop

UM-Flint Approval #44/03

This is to inform you that your proposal "Writer's Workshop" has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. Please take note that your use of human subjects is approved, only as detailed in your approved application. Should you wish to make any changes in the use of human subjects that differ from the approved proposal, you must inform this committee prior to making these changes. If you are seeking funding for this proposal, it is your responsibility to ensure that your proposed use of human subjects in your funding application is consistent with that approved by this memo.

Should you observe any negative change in the health or behavior of a human subject attributable to this research, you are required to suspend your project. If this happens, please inform the committee as soon as possible for our further review and decision as to the continuation /termination of your project.

This approval for your project is valid for a period of twelve months. If your project extends beyond this period (twelve months), please re-submit your proposal for reconsideration.

Acknowledgements

The research conducted throughout this project was conducted at Flint Central High School, located in Flint, MI. The students who chose to participate within the Writer's Workshop were all students registered in my tenth grade Successful Writing course. The students were the most important factor in this research project and I am grateful for their honesty and hard work.

Dr. Rose Casement, an assistant professor of education at the University of Michigan – Flint, assisted me throughout the creation and implementation of the research project. Dr. Casement was not only a wealth of information, but also a great support during times of uncertainty.

Student names have been changed to protect the privacy of the students.

Rebecca S. Edgar

The University of Michigan - Flint

Abstract

Writers Workshop is a method of teaching in which the students are allowed freedom of choice within their writing. The classroom environment supports and nurtures the students throughout the writing process because the students are the center of instruction, not the curriculum. The Writers Workshop is based on the following basic principles that guide writing instruction:

- Students need to write at least four times per week, for at least a half an hour, within the classroom.
- Students need to have choice with their writing.
- Teachers need to write with their students to establish a writing community.
- Mini-lessons should be used to teach conventions, usages, the roles of writing, etc.
- Effective recordkeeping must be used to establish accountability for the students.
- Writers need time to read other writers work, both professional authors and peer work.
- Students need the opportunity to publish pieces of their choosing.

The teacher is responsible for establishing a community-of-writers atmosphere within the classroom by establishing procedures and policies based on the Writers Workshop teaching principles. The students are expected to take responsibility for their behavior and effort within the classroom as well as their writing in order to grow and progress as writers.

A Writers Workshop that was established within a tenth grade English classroom at Flint Central High School was not as productive as the teacher expected. Through the

use of classroom observation, note taking, journaling, and student interviews the teacher discovered that the current practices within the classroom were actually having an adverse effect on the writing environment. The students were not behaving or thinking like writers simply because the instructor failed to make the students responsible for their own work and progress as writers within the workshop. The recordkeeping system within the workshop was non-existent because the instructor did not hold the students accountable for using the records. This discovery has helped the teacher understand and establish a more proficient Writers Workshop within the classroom by instituting a more effective recordkeeping system for the students to use and maintain.

Chapter One – Origins of the Question

The third hour bell rings. The students begin to filter into the classroom. Some are excited at the prospect of putting their thoughts on paper; some are dreading the hour that they will spend writing. The tardy bell rings. "Okay guys, you know what we're supposed to do. Please get out your writing notebooks and begin working. I'll check with each of you in a few minutes to see what you're working on. Let's get busy!" The excited students already have their notebooks open and are working hastily, writing as fast as their hands and thoughts will allow. Other students slowly search for their notebooks, sharpen their pencils, look for the piece they were working on yesterday, dreading the inevitable: the blank page. The prospect of writing for these students is akin to having a cavity filled. It's 9:53 a.m. on an ordinary day in Classroom 120 at Flint Central High School. The Writers Workshop has begun.

The students become restless after only a good ten minutes of writing. There are only a few students who continue to write, or are reading another student's piece. The students know they are expected to work on some aspect of writing for the entire class period. However, the classroom continues to become noisier because many students have started talking about their plans for the weekend. It is quite evident that the students are getting off track. Many students have already put away their writer's notebooks. I ask, "Why aren't you guys working in your notebooks? You know we all work on something for the entire hour, not just twenty minutes." I continue to get the same response: "I wrote one page already! I have nothing else to work on!" I don't understand why the students fail to realize that just writing one page only to fulfill their writing requirement for the day is not good enough. As I check in with individual students to mark their

progress for the day on my form, I notice that many students are copying down song lyrics, or only keeping a daily journal. This is not even close to what I have envisioned for my students' experiences within the Writers Workshop. My students have not become writers. Only a select few behave and think like writers.

It is clear that what is occurring in my classroom is not helping each individual student to progress as a writer. My intention as a teacher is to help each student become a literate individual who understands the importance of reading and writing not only within the classroom, but also within his or her own life. Student interest and motivation to write seem to be the biggest links between how students view the required work of the classroom and the amount of effort they put into their writing. I am interested in researching how I can format the Writers Workshop environment to establish the link between each individual student's life and the amount of effort my students put forth in their writing. It is evident that I have not created the type of environment in which students will take risks and push themselves as writers. I need to understand how I can reformat the workshop to instill more personal interest and motivation within each individual writer, not only the few students who already enjoy and use the Writing Workshop to their benefit.

Chapter Two – Research Question

I will use the following question to guide my research within the Writers Workshop:

- What do teachers, researchers and students have to say about establishing best practices in writing workshop environments?

This question is the heart of what I see occurring within my classroom. I am having a difficult time pinpointing the problems within the Writers Workshop I have established in my tenth grade English class. My students are not performing like writers, but only producing the least amount of writing possible in order to receive a passing grade for the class. There are also a few sub-questions I will incorporate within my research:

- How is the writing environment currently established?
- How many students are completing the writing requirements?
- Are students being productive during their writing time?
- Is the writing environment set up to help students be successful within the workshop?

These sub-questions will help me explore the foundations of the Writers Workshop that I have utilized within the classroom. I believe the workshop is not adequately designed to support students through the writing process, but I am not exactly sure where the failure is at this moment in time. I hope that the research will help steer me in the right direction, in order to reformat the sections of the workshop environment that are not working.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

The Writers Workshop is a relatively new methodology to the approach of writing within the classroom that has grown out of the whole language movement. According to Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores, 1987, "whole language isn't a method, but 'a set of beliefs, a perspective. It must become practice, but it is not the practice itself'" (cited in Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1996, p. 3). Many educators have confused the whole language perspective with the Writers Workshop approach simply because they are closely related in practice. Both rely on trusting the students to take responsibility for their education through the creation of classrooms and curricula that utilize each student's abilities and previous knowledge as the basis of teaching. Rhodes and Dudley-Marling (1996) believe:

> Whole language classrooms can ... create spaces that are congenial to the range of differences students bring with them to school and enable students to acquire a range of reading and writing practices that will help them overcome the disadvantage and discrimination that limit their vocational and social choices. (p. 2)

Whole language practice is the basis of the Writers Workshop approach because the students are at the heart of the educational process within the workshop. The teacher does not make every decision for the student. Rather, the students are expected to make many decisions themselves and rely on the teacher, as well as peers, in order to learn to navigate through every aspect of the writing process.

Several teachers are the forerunners in Writers Workshop theory and practice. Donald Graves, Professor Emeritus from the University of New Hampshire, has researched writing for over two decades and has promoted the use of Writers Workshop for students of all ages. Many teachers and researchers refer to Grave's work when researching the benefits of Writers Workshop. Donald Murray, Professor Emeritus from the University of New Hampshire, has written extensively on the benefits of utilizing a Writers Workshop within the classroom. Murray believes students are ready and willing to become writers in the truest sense if they are only provided with the opportunity as well as the necessary tools. Nancie Atwell, a seventh and eighth grade writing, reading, and history teacher at the Center for Teaching and Learning located in Edgecomb, Maine, has created a Writers Workshop that incorporates the beliefs and theory that have become the foundations of many classrooms across the nation. Jane Hansen, Professor of Reading and Writing at the University of New Hampshire, has researched reading instruction and the effects it has on student writing. Hansen believes the teaching of reading and writing need to be interrelated within the classroom because of the dependence of the two disciplines upon each other. Many other teachers have researched Writers Workshop; however, the work of the above theorists has become the cornerstone of Writers Workshop theory and practice.

The Writers Workshop is a method of immersing students in the writing process in order to help them begin to think like writers. Many students approach writing assignments just as they would approach an algebra problem. Unfortunately, many students mistakenly have been led to believe that writing is a step-by-step linear process that can be completed with little effort and little thought. Donald Graves (1990) believes

"there is a common notion that writers feel inspired and then they write. But it is just the opposite. They write, and then *maybe* they will be inspired" (p. 26). Students fail to realize how tedious the writing process can be, even for professional writers. According to a study on the status of writing conducted by Graves (1978) for the Ford Foundation, most adults do not remember a particular teacher who helped them learn to write. Graves interviewed all different types of people from all different aspects of life. Graves (1994) states:

> Thirty-eight of the interviewees were professional writers but not one of them learned to write in school: sixty-five percent could not cite a single teacher who had helped them say something worthwhile; thirty percent had one teacher who made all the difference in their writing; no one had more than two good teachers in a lifetime of learning to write. (p. 4)

Graves' study alludes to how many students feel about writing within the classroom. Not one of the interviewees believed they learned to express their own thoughts and feelings within school. There are many teachers who do not allow students to choose their own writing topics, yet students are still expected to learn the importance of writing within their lives. Most of the writing students produce in school is responses to generic topics generated by generic teaching manuals that many teachers rely on because they are afraid. The fear that many teachers face rests on the belief that many students are not prepared to handle the responsibility that is required of them within a Writers Workshop. Teachers are afraid to let the students make decisions because it is scary to relinquish control over so many individuals within the confines of the classroom. The reality is that

responsibility and choice are essential ingredients of learning, especially when a student is learning to become a lifelong writer.

The teacher is not only required to relinquish control of the students, but also to grow and mature as a teacher. The very nature of a Writers Workshop demands that the teacher trusts all students and be able and willing to change any teaching approaches or methods to meet the needs of individual students within the classroom. Too often, teachers do not consider the needs of the students when planning and executing the curriculum mostly because it requires more work and effort by the teacher. A Writers Workshop teacher must be flexible and willing to change the lesson plans at a moment's notice in order to establish the type of writing environment that is crucial to Writers Workshop. Graves suggests teachers utilize the following attributes as a part of their teaching repertoire to establish the appropriate teaching practices within a Writers Workshop:

- Take a writer seriously.
- Help writers to have high expectations.
- Show writers how to write by writing yourself.
- Give the writer a chance to say something worthwhile.
- Get to know the student beyond the classroom.
- Use failure as a way to teach, not punish.
- Help students to teach others through their writing.
- Be a learner. (1994, p.13–14)

Different teachers will have different attributes that they believe are important to the teaching of writing. These attributes are directly linked to the experiences that each

individual teacher had when they were writing in school. Unfortunately, many teachers have had negative experiences writing in school and are not prepared to teach writing in a different manner. Different experiences will result in different expectations and teaching approaches simply because teaching styles vary according to the individual teacher. However, each writing teacher must respect each student not only as a student but also as a fellow writer, provide the opportunity for students to have choice within the classroom, and be willing to explore all of the facets of the writing process along with the students.

The Writers Workshop approach takes into account the abilities of each and every student within the classroom. In an era in which teachers are overwhelmed by the disparities between ability levels within one individual classroom, the Writers Workshop approach accounts for and appreciates the different learning abilities of all students. Graves believes that in order for a teacher to be effective, each student's individual abilities must be discovered and encouraged within the classroom. The only way this can be achieved is through direct observation and communication with each student. Too often, many students are neglected within the classroom simply because the teacher is not prepared to address that student's particular need as a learner. Unfortunately, those students usually become part of the backdrop of the classroom and are ignored on a daily basis. Donald Graves (1994) believes that an effective teacher is one who attempts to teach each individual student, regardless of ability level, within the classroom. Graves states: "One of our most important roles in teaching is that of being an effective *learning historian*, who works actively to help children become aware of an effective learning history. This means that we look at children's abilities quite broadly" (p. 16). The reality of teaching writing relies on the fact that each individual student may learn to

write in a different manner than other students within the same classroom. The Writers Workshop approach allows the needed communication between the teacher and the student, as well as the student's peers, which will provide the framework for the learning environment within the classroom.

The goal of a Writers Workshop is to help students become literate individuals who can use language effectively within society. Jeffrey Wilhelm (1996), a teacher-researcher concerned with incorporating state and national standards within the Writers Workshop, describes "literacy as the ability to comprehend, interpret, critique, and construct meanings with a variety of symbols and tools" (p. 4). Students will acquire the necessary skills to become literate through the use of a Writers Workshop because the students will be met at their individual ability level. Effective Writers Workshops not only teach the tools of effective communication, but they also establish the basis for lifelong reading and writing.

The Writers Workshop needs to be based on some basic elements in order to be an effective, successful workshop environment. The basic elements include, but are in no way limited to, the following principles (Atwell, 1998; Graves 1990, 1994; Murray, 1982; Muschla, 1993; Romano, 1987):

- Students need to write four times per week, for at least a half an hour, within the classroom.
- Students need to have choice with their writing.
- Teachers need to write with their students to establish a writing community.
- Mini-lessons should be used to teach conventions, usages, the roles of writing, etc.

- Effective recordkeeping must be used to establish accountability for the students.
- Writers need time to read other writer's work, both professional authors as well as peer work.
- Students need the opportunity to publish pieces of their choosing.

The Writers Workshop is intended to meet all individual students at their level, not a generic level created by a predetermined curriculum. The reality is that all students are not on the same writing and reading levels, even though they may be in the same grade as well as the same classroom. When a teacher establishes a Writers Workshop each individual student will be helped at their individual level, thus the appropriate scaffolding will be provided for all students not just those who are performing at the predetermined generic grade level imposed on teachers by generic curriculums.

WRITING TIME

A Writers Workshop must include writing time within the classroom for students to write. Students need at least three consecutive days during the week to write; however, four or five writing sessions are best to help get students into the habit of writing (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1994; Murray, 1985). If students do not write consistently within the classroom, a Writers Workshop will never be successful. When students write on a daily basis, they begin to think and act like writers, even composing outside of the classroom when an idea strikes them. Graves believes: "Discovering the power of writing requires daily writing....This advice not only contributes to the quality of the writing, it makes writing so much easier" (1990, p. 33). Teaching writing is not a subject that can begin and end within the confines of one class period. Because of its cyclical nature, writers are in a "constant state of composition" (Graves, 1994, p. 104). This

means that writers think about their pieces of writing even when they are not actively in the process of writing.

Establishing writing time three or more times per week within the classroom may seem to be a daunting task to many teachers, especially those who teach in secondary schools. Donald Graves (1994) suggests teachers rethink how time is used within the classroom in order to provide this necessary amount of writing time for students. For example, a teacher may decide to have writing time at the beginning of the school day when students are still trickling in the room, or at the beginning of the hour for those who teach secondary grades. Another approach could be to possibly combine the teaching of reading and writing into one ninety-minute block of time, or for older students, combine the teaching of writing with the teaching of literature. Graves states:

> The very act of writing itself, through heightening meaning and perception, prepares us both consciously and unconsciously to see more possibilities for writing subjects. Writing that occurs only once every two weeks limits the ability to make choices because it limits both the practice of writing and the exercises of topic selection. (p. 77)

Many teachers of writing approach writing as if it is any other ordinary subject. However, this is not the best approach because writing through its very nature is a cyclical process that can have different beginnings and endings according to the individual. The teaching of writing does not fit into a predetermined lesson because each student will always be at a different stage within the writing process if the writing that is occurring is authentic. Authentic writing will not occur if the students are not allowed time to pre-write, draft, and revise their work on a regular basis within the classroom.

Nancie Atwell agrees that students need to write on a consistent basis within the classroom workshop. Atwell (1998) states: "Without at least three writing workshops a week (preferably four or five), it will be hard for kids to conceive topics, sustain projects of their own, and behave as writers" (p. 91). Students must write for an extended period of time at least three times per week if they are going to develop into authentic writers. Authentic writing demands writing time, which must be incorporated into the classroom curriculum.

Teachers, especially secondary English teachers concerned with the other educational demands of a preset curriculum, fear that the mandated topics will not be taught if so much time is set aside for writing each week. Atwell (1998) suggests the following ways to incorporate other curriculum demands within the workshop:

- Writing workshop four days a week (e.g., Monday – Thursday) for one semester, with an hour's worth of writing as homework between Thursday night and Monday morning.
- The required curriculum four days a week for the alternate semester.
- Reading workshop on one regularly scheduled fifth day (e.g., Friday) throughout the entire school year, and frequent booktalks and literary minilessons.
- A half hour's worth of independent reading as homework every night. (p. 97 – 98)

The basic building block of any Writers Workshop is writing time. Without time to write, the students will not grow and mature as writers and will continue to rely on the teacher to provide topics and corrections, instead of learning to rely on themselves as writers.

The teacher must provide the students with the guidelines and expectations of the classroom in order for each student to be successful. In a Writers Workshop, one major expectation must be that each student writes daily, or during the scheduled writing session for the day, for an extended period of time. Donald Murray (1985) believes that daily writing will provide the necessary conditions for students to develop topics on their own because they will begin to think like writers. Students will begin to collect information through six different approaches:

1. Awareness
2. Observation
3. Recall – Brainstorming, mapping, exploration, and drafting
4. Empathy
5. Interviewing
6. Library research (p. 13 – 15)

Students will begin to collect information and notice the little details of life when given the opportunity to write on a consistent basis. The fact remains that writers write every day, even composing in their minds when not physically in the process of writing. Writing time will provide the necessary conditions for students to collect information and begin to write authentically. When students begin to think and behave like writers, they will become "a spy on life, looking inattentive while paying close attention, overhearing what is being said, noticing what is not being done, experiencing the taste of fear, the smell of death, the feel of pavement moving under a jogger's feet" (Murray, 1985, p. 13). Students need time to write just to jot down their thoughts, questions and wonderings in order to develop writing topics to explore further within the Writers Workshop.

A classroom needs to be predictable in order to provide sufficient writing time for students within the Writing Workshop. A predictable classroom includes the following:

- Have students write each day. This sets up a sense of structure and predictability.
- Establish a basic structure for writing time. "First, get out your folders, write, then share your writing."
- Set up procedures for solving problems, then post them in the room so students remember what to do when they need help.
- Circulate among the students. Conference, write, and listen to other students.
- Negotiate class management issues with students – This makes students feel they are responsible for the classroom atmosphere. (Graves, 1994, p. 111)

Predictable classrooms take the guesswork out of what is expected of the students as well as provides the foundation for the classroom. Students need to be provided with the school and classroom rules in order to be successful writers.

Graves introduced the concept of "literate occasions" in order to help teachers rearrange their class schedules to accommodate four days of writing within the classroom. A "literate occasion" occurs when students write for ten minutes about something that occurred during the day that the writer thought was interesting (1990, p. 21). Graves believes that students, as well as teachers, need to be taught to "read the world" in order to find the literate occasions of one's life. He believes "the writer's first act is to listen and observe the details of living" (1994, p. 36). "Reading the world" simply means that writers pay attention to the world in which they live, and then they write about those details. For example, a student may choose to write about the bus ride to school that morning or about what his or her mom is making for dinner that night

because it is his or her favorite meal. Writers write about their lives and what they know about the world. Graves, explaining the benefits of literate occasions, states:

> Life presents us with edges, questions, moments, and experiences to listen to and observe. I only have to pick up the morning newspaper and hundreds of these occasions leap off the page, things that make me laugh or produce anger. At the same time, there are whole pages I don't understand, like the stock market reports. And I never look at advertisements (why don't I). When I write for ten minutes I take the questions, joys, and complexities of life and set them down in front of me on the page so that I can see them, and maybe understand them a little better. (1990, p. 23)

Many students believe that they do not have anything important to write about, but what they fail to realize is that their own lives are full of writing opportunities. It is the job of the Writers Workshop teacher to provide the writing time necessary for students to discover the writing topics within their daily lives.

TOPIC CHOICE

The very nature of a Writers Workshop allows for student choice concerning writing topics. If students are forced to write about topics that are of no interest to them, their writing will be generic and lack voice. Choice is a powerful tool that a teacher must use if the students are expected to produce writing that is authentic. Donald Graves interviewed a teacher, referred to as Linda, about her decision to instill a Writers Workshop and allow students to choose their own topics. Linda states:

> I started out doing what other teachers said I should be doing. I started out with units. Over time I've just weeded out units [and now I give kids] real choice [in

> their] writing. I couldn't let go of things all at once. I offered them topics. I wasn't comfortable that they really knew what to write about. I needed more time to let them come up with their own topics. I was trusting them, but not nearly enough. I wasn't trusting myself in the sense that I had to be accountable to someone for what I was doing. I had to have some test and skill results of what the kids were doing. I hadn't been doing enough writing myself to know what a real writer does. I think I was relying on my past history with teachers myself. I waited for their topics, waited for the teacher to fix it, recopied their corrections, then handed it in for a grade. I knew that wasn't right, because I never felt like a writer when I wrote under those conditions. I kept taking courses to find out what worked for me as a writer. Writing is both fun and very important for me now, and that's what I want for my students. (Graves, 1990, p. 8)

Many teachers have had the same experiences as Linda had while in school; thus they rely on the methods that were used by their English teachers because that is what they know. Students must be taught how to develop their own writing topics; otherwise many students will not write. Many students complain that they "have nothing to write about" because they have become accustomed to relying on the teacher to supply the "Topic of the Day." Graves suggests teaching the students to "read the world" for a topic because students need to "learn how to *listen to themselves*" (Graves, 1994, p. 55). Teachers can accomplish teaching students to "read the world" by selecting topics from their own lives that will be of interest to the students, and then beginning to write on that topic either on an overhead projector or the front board of the classroom. Some students will need topics

supplied for them, especially in the beginning, simply because of their previous experiences writing in other classrooms.

Teachers can help their students discover writing topics within their own lives through reading pieces by other writers aloud within the classroom, allowing them to choose their own writing topics, assigning writing topics when needed, and having the students freewrite on a regular basis. A freewrite occurs when students do not have a predetermined writing topic. The students just begin to write for a specified amount of time, usually at least fifteen minutes, without stopping to correct mistakes, reread what was written, or to even think about what they are writing. A few suggestions to get students writing are

- Write about what you know.
- Write with details; sketch rapidly.
- Don't revise in early drafts.
- Experiment, but be yourself.
- Write a letter.
- Write a chunk, instead of a whole piece.
- Write backwards – Sometimes writing the ending of a piece helps the writer figure out how to begin writing the piece.
- Set a quota – If students have a designated number of words or pages they must complete, it helps many students get a handle of the piece they are trying to write. (Graves, 1990; Murray, 1985)

The above suggestions are only intended as an impetus to get students writing. Teachers should not rely on them as a cornerstone of any Writers Workshop. Teachers should

incorporate various genres of writing and have students experiment with all types of writing, not only rely on freewrites or assigned writing topics to fulfill writing obligations within the classroom. When students begin to gain confidence in themselves as writers, they will begin to learn to discover writing topics on their own.

Even though students are given the freedom of choice concerning writing topics, "...they are expected to write. They must produce. Sometimes topic assignments are helpful and even necessary. Students do make bad choices and experience writer's block, or they need to shift to new topics after exhausting their usual few" (Graves, 1994, p. 108). In fact, one of the most common complaints teachers and students have concerning the Writers Workshop is writer's block. Many teachers do not know how to respond to students who consistently state: "I have nothing to write about." Graves believes that teachers cause writer's block by "setting standards that are too high" (1990, p. 35). Students need to simply put the pen on the paper and write. It does not matter what the student writes about, or if it even makes any sense. The idea is to get the students used to putting words on paper, without worrying about the content or if a word is spelled correctly. Once students become comfortable with putting words on paper, they will begin to search for topics that they choose to write about, preferably something that is of high importance to the student. Graves recognizes that "writers write in simple, direct language and try to sound like themselves" (1990, p. 35). If a teacher emphasizes how professional writers write, the students will be much more comfortable writing what they know and their writing will sound authentic, versus the students only trying to sound "smart" within their writing.

There are many ways a teacher can help a student learn to discover writing topics. Murray (1990) suggests using the following questions within the workshop to help students generate their own writing topics:

- What do I keep thinking about?
- What do I know a lot about?
- What do I know how to do really well?
- What is important to me?
- What do I want to find out more about?
- Who or what do I care a lot about?
- Who is someone important to me that I want to write about?
- What do I like to do?
- What was an important time in my life?
- If I think back to an earlier time in my life, what do I remember?
- What am I worried about?
- What am I happy about?
- What am I angry about? (p. 79- 80)

These questions are intended to be used only with students who are having a very difficult time discovering writing topics. The idea is not to have students write to a prompt, but only to provide the additional support that some students will need especially in the beginning of the Writers Workshop. If students have spent the majority of their time in school learning to write to a prompt, it becomes the job of the Writing Workshop teacher to teach those students how to discover writing topics on their own. This is not an easy task mostly because it requires the teacher to get to really know all of the students

on a personal level. It is much easier to write "Tell me about your summer vacation" on the board and have students write a five-paragraph essay that is void of voice as well as student interest. Paying attention to the details of life is what writers do on a daily basis in order to discover topics, questions, wonderings, or concerns that the student wishes to explore in greater detail through writing. When a student discovers those topics that are of a great personal interest, having something to write about during workshop time will no longer be an issue within the classroom.

MINI-LESSONS

English teachers are not only responsible for teaching students to write well, but teachers also have to help students learn the conventions of writing. A great way to accomplish this without taking away from the Writers Workshop is through utilizing mini-lessons within the context of the workshop (Atwell, 1998). A mini-lesson is a short lesson designed to address the specific needs of the students at that given moment in time within the Writers Workshop. For example, a teacher may decide to conduct a mini-lesson on the correct use of commas in text after noticing that many students were attempting to use commas but doing so incorrectly. Mini-lessons can be used whenever needed by the teacher and students, but have been found to be most beneficial at the beginning of the workshop time because the students are getting ready to write and the new material will be fresh in their minds as they begin to work on their pieces. Atwell believes that mini-lessons have benefited her teaching in a variety of ways, especially because she looks for what the students need to learn more actively instead of just relying on a prefabricated curriculum. Atwell (1998) states:

> Minilessons in writing workshop have become a tool for teaching at least as powerful as my conferences with individual writers. Minilessons reach more than one writer at a time, provide frames of reference when writers and I confer, and grow from what I see my students doing, not doing, and needing next. Minilessons give me a forum for telling, just as engagingly as I can, about the behaviors and traditions and conventions of writers. (p. 24)

Mini-lessons are a place to provide the students with what they need as growing writers. The problem with most preset curricula lies in the fact that the needs of the individual students are not the main consideration. However, real learning has to be based on what the individual student needs at that given moment in time. Mini-lessons, when used in accordance with observation of what the students need to know, provide the needed tools to help students express themselves better in their writing.

Mini-lessons are also a great way to introduce many of the difficulties and concerns that all writers face, both professional and student writers alike. For example, a teacher may begin to draft a piece on an overhead transparency in an effort to demonstrate how a writer may approach a specific piece of writing. Another tactic a teacher could use is to have a student peer edit his or her piece of writing within a small group setting. These types of teaching methods take the authority away from the teacher and help create the community-of-writers atmosphere that is necessary within a workshop setting.

Many mini-lessons can be designed to introduce different approaches to writing, conventions used in writing and different writing genres. Teacher–researcher Jeffrey

Wilhelm (1996) suggests the following mini-lessons in order to encourage students to write and generate their own ideas:

- Personality Profile Unit: Each student writes about his or her earliest learning memory as a reader, and the most significant events in his or her life as readers and writers. The students share the information with a peer, and then place it within their writer's notebooks.
- Three Stories: The students tell three one-sentence stories about themselves to two other students; one sentence is true, but the other two are false. The two students write down which two sentences they believe are false along with the reason why it is false. This is also sometimes referred to as frontloading which relies on modeling, defining, constructing critical standards, brainstorming, and building strategic knowledge before students actually begin to write.
- Picture Talk: The teacher brings in pictures of various people and displays them for students. The students make up stories and names for the people including who the people were, where they lived, what their job was, what their home looked like, what each person did on a Saturday night, and what they might have been doing or thinking when the picture was taken. If the teacher wished to push the kids a little further, or for advanced writers, the students could possibly write a dialogue between the people in the pictures.
- Protocols, Think Alouds, Write Alongs: While reading a story aloud to the class, the teacher stops and asks the students to write down what they are thinking, asking, feeling, noticing or doing at that point in the story.

- Two-Column Note-Taking Technique: The story is printed on the left hand of the paper; the right side is left blank and intended for students to take notes or jot down questions and observations as they read the story.
- Literary Letters (Atwell, 1987): The students are asked to write letters in their writer's notebooks about a specific question or prompt. This is an especially great way for students to monitor their own reading.
- Tell-Me Framework (Chambers, 1985): The teacher asks the students to "Tell me about _____" instead of a direct question in order to remove the teacher's authority and make the students think for themselves instead of relying on the teacher for a writing prompt.

There are a number of different mini-lessons a teacher may use within the Writing Workshop to help students generate ideas for writing. This teaching strategy is a great way for a teacher to provide the students with the needed information and support they may need in order to be successful writers and continue to mature as both readers and writers. However, the students' needs must be the basis for any mini-lesson that a teacher uses within the workshop. These types of lessons will make up a majority of the curriculum of the Writers Workshop because they are what the teacher uses to introduce new ideas and clarify specific problems the students may have with the writing process.

Reading is also an extremely important facet of the writing process that a teacher needs to utilize within the Writers Workshop. Reluctant readers may need extra support when learning how to read for enjoyment. Mini-lessons are a great way to provide support to those students who need extra guidance. A teacher could use the following mini-lessons in a small group setting to help reluctant readers:

- Prediction: Read the opening of a book and predict possible outcomes.
- Word Strategies: Demonstrate strategies for uncovering the meaning of unknown words.
- Story Elements: Demonstrate how authors handle characters, dialogue, plot, leads or openings, settings, endings. Each of these is a separate mini-lesson and could be used in conjunction with a writing mini-lesson because of the obvious overlap between genres.
- Paragraphs: Teachers could demonstrate how to make a straight copy of a child's piece.
- Choosing books: Demonstrate how to tell if a book is easy, in the middle, or difficult for the students.
- Using References: Demonstrate how to use the dictionary, encyclopedia, library, or any other tool students may have difficulty with using.
- Anticipatory Guides: True/False sheets used to access a student's prior knowledge before reading a selection.
- Reciprocal Reading: (Palinscar & Brown, 1984, 1989): Two students read a selection. One student is the reader; the other student is the leader who explains the selection. The students read the selection again after switching roles.
- Symbolic Story Representation (Encisco, 1990): Students make cutouts of characters or other elements in the story and dramatize them.
- Drama and Reading: Drama is a way to help students integrate information, as a personal experience, into longer social contexts. (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1990; Hansen, 1987; Wilhelm, 1996)

Mini-lessons provide the support that reluctant readers may need in order to make the connection between the materials they read and their personal lives. Reading will become important to students when they are given the freedom of choice to read things that are important to their personal lives and the bigger questions they may have about life.

Mini-lessons are a great tool for a teacher to have within his or her teaching repertoire. Mini-lessons can be designed to fit any curriculum and address the needs of the students within individual classrooms. When mini-lessons are used within the Writers Workshop, the writing and reading abilities of many students will improve because they will have the opportunity to master skills they need at that given moment.

RECORDKEEPING AND CONFERENCES

A major element that helps the Writers Workshop to run smoothly is the use of effective recordkeeping. The students are responsible for writing, editing, peer conferencing, and publishing. However, an effective recordkeeping system must be put into effect within the workshop in order for the teacher to hold each individual student responsible for their own work and progress as a writer. In order for records to be effective, many different types of records will need to be tried within the classroom in order for the teacher to discover what will work best for both the instructor as well as the students. It is imperative that the students are the ones who are filling out and referring to their records on a daily basis because "responsibility is the key to classroom organization" (Graves, 1994, p. 115). The students, not the teacher, need to be responsible for their own recordkeeping simply because the records are an extension of their continued growth as a writer. A teacher may have students use records to keep track

of the types of genres a student is using, the conventions a student may be having trouble with, words the student is trying to learn, the amount of writing the student accomplished during a workshop session, peer-editing sessions, self-editing checklists, or the number of times a student has revisited a particular piece of writing. Atwell (1998) suggests teachers use the following types of records within the workshop environment:

- Writing Survey – for students to think about and discuss individual student's writing experiences.
- Reading Survey – for students to learn about the student's reading experiences.
- Student Writing Record – for students to keep track of writing pieces.
- Student Reading Record – for students to keep track of books the student has read or abandoned during the year.
- Individual Proofreading List – for students to list the conventions they have learned to use in their writing.
- Editing Checksheet – for students to use and attach to completed pieces of writing.
- Peer Writing Conference Record – for students to use during peer-conferences to capture their responses for the student writer.
- Personal Spelling List – for students to list the words they cannot spell in order to compile a reference for the students as they write.
- Weekly Word Study Sheet – for students to practice five spelling words they select each week from their Personal Spelling List.
- Weekly Homework Assignment Sheet – for students to record daily and weekly homework assignments.

According to Atwell, an effective system of recordkeeping "puts major responsibility on individuals" (1998, p. 106). Students are the ones who are responsible for growing and maturing as writers and readers within the workshop. The added responsibility of recording their work not only helps the students learn to depend on themselves, but also keeps the students on track and aware of the amount of work, or lack thereof, they are producing. The teacher is responsible for providing and maintaining an environment in which all individuals can be successful, not for completing the work for the students.

Conferences are also important within the Writers Workshop. Student-teacher conferences provide the opportunity for the student to receive one-on-one instruction within the classroom as well as the opportunity to share their writing with a more seasoned writer. When discussing the impact of student-teacher conferences on student writing, Atwell (1998) states:

> The purpose of my conferences is not to get writers to revise. I confer with kids about ideas, information, purpose, audience, language, and format so they can consider what's working, what needs more work, and what they can do next to make the writing work better. (p. 221)

Atwell realizes the importance of conferencing with students is not to have the students revise their writing so it resembles how the teacher would write. Rather, the teacher's goal should be to provide the support a student will need to maneuver through the writing process. Students do get stuck and experience writer's block a lot of the time because they are in the process of learning to behave and think like writers. The conference should be used to help students discover strategies for dealing with the stumbling block

that all writers, even professional writers, face on a regular basis. Atwell suggests the following guidelines when conducting student-teacher writing conferences:

- Keep an eye on the clock in order to reach all writers during the writing session. Limit conference time to around five minutes per student.
- Meet with as many writers as possible each writing session. Keep notes about each student to refer to before each conference, as well as to make sure you are meeting with each writer at least once each week.
- Go to the student's desk to conduct the conference. This way the teacher controls the conference and can also monitor the other students behavior.
- Make the conference personal and intimate. It should feel like a conversation.
- Whisper and ask students to whisper when they confer with you in order to not disturb other students who are working.
- Strive for balance between listening to students and discussing their writing.
- If a piece is too long to have the student read it aloud to you, ask the student if you can take a copy of it home with you and jot down notes on a Post-It note to discuss the next time you confer with that student.
- Build on what students know and can do well, instead of focusing on what is wrong with the piece.
- Avoid generalized praise such as "Very good!" Students need specific responses like "Your images are very detailed. I saw the brown dog you described in my mind as you were reading aloud to me."

- Ask the students specifically what you are curious or are wondering about. What don't you understand? What doesn't make sense to you? What are you wondering about?
- Come prepared to make notes and take notes. Use a conference form, or even something as simple as Post-It notes.
- Ask permission to write on a student's draft if the occasion arises for you to demonstrate some aspect of writing for the student. A person's writing is sacred and should be treated as such.
- Be patient. Trust yourself and your students. (1998, p. 224 – 226)

Teachers need to remember at all times that a student-teacher writing conference is intended to support the students, not demonstrate how much a teacher knows about writing. All students need to be treated like writers, not only students, if they are ever to begin to behave and think like writers. Conferences are a great teaching tool to utilize within the Writers Workshop because a conference is a place where the teacher gets to know the student as an individual.

Peer conferences are equally important within the Writers Workshop. Students learn a great deal more about writing when they help a fellow writer wade through the writing process. The students need to be provided with guidelines similar to the student-teacher conferences if they are to be productive in their peer conferences. It will take the students a great deal of practice peer-conferencing to become proficient. It is the job of the Writers Workshop instructor to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to conference because this is an important aspect of the workshop environment. Modeling responses in a large group setting is a great way to teach students how to communicate

during a peer conference. Atwell suggests conducting a mini-lesson in which the teacher lists the important aspects of the peer conference. Atwell (1998) states:

> On the easel I list principles of conferring – how the writer explains what he or she wants, then reads the writing aloud, and how responders listen, ask questions about things they don't understand or would like to know more about, and give the writer specific feedback he or she asked for. (p. 158)

Students will learn a great deal about appropriate versus inappropriate responses during the modeling exercise combined with the mini-lesson because the students will have the opportunity to see how to communicate during a conference. Peer conferencing will help each individual student grow as a writer because of the opportunity to share what he or she knows about the writing process with a fellow writer.

REVISION AND EDITING

The Writing Workshop must be conducive to the editing and revision process if students are going to be successful. First and foremost, students have to be taught how to edit and revise their own, as well as peer, writing. Editing and revising require students to share their work with their peers as well as with the teacher. It is imperative that students rely on other students to receive feedback and different perspectives because it helps them learn about themselves as writers as well as consider the audience for a particular piece of writing. Students will revert to comments like "That was good!" or "I liked your story!" if they are not taught exactly how to respond and what to look for within a piece of writing. An Author's Chair (Rhodes & Dudley - Marling, 1996) is a great way to demonstrate how to edit and revise within a large group setting. A teacher asks a student who is willing to share his or her work to come to the front of the class and

read their piece aloud (it also helps to have a copy of the text on an overhead transparency for students to view). When the student is done reading, he or she asks the class about something specific within the piece that may be problematic for the author, and then the class responds orally to the questions by providing specifics from the piece. When students are shown how to workshop a piece of writing, they will have a template to work from when they are asked to peer-conference, student-teacher conference, or edit their own piece of writing. Tom Romano, an English teacher who teaches at Edgewood High School in Trenton, Ohio, agrees that students need to be taught how to revise in order to be successful. Romano (1987) states:

> I keep reinforcing the idea that to help another writer, you don't have to be critical in a way that most teenagers think of the word. You don't have to tear down. You don't have to cast judgment. Fellow writers can help a good deal by just reporting honestly how the words affected them and asking questions that coax the writer to be expansive in [his or] her talk. (p. 68)

It is important for teachers to acknowledge the importance of direct instruction when students are learning how to revise and edit. Guidelines must be provided for the students that specifically help them respond to another writer's piece. Examples of appropriate responses and/or suggestions can be placed within the students' writing portfolios to help guide them through the revision/editing process. The guidelines will be very similar to the types of responses that are appropriate during conferences because a lot of revision and editing may occur during conferences. Eventually, the students will become less reliant on the guidelines and the revision/editing process will become a part of the student's writing repertoire. Students learn how to revise and edit when they

actually see how to do it and have practice within the workshop, versus only telling them how to revise without any instruction.

Many students will find revision and editing very difficult, especially if they have not had a lot of experience revising their work. Graves suggests looking for the following signs to determine whether or not a student needs additional support when learning to revise and edit:

- Lack of knowledge about the subject.
- Lack of understanding about the uniqueness of writing.
- Lack of audience sense.
- Motor problems (i.e. writing task is tedious and difficult).
- Lack of time to write, either within the classroom or at home.
- The student writes too much.
- The student is unfamiliar with the genre. (1994, p. 236)

Sometimes students make really bad decisions while writing simply because it is part of the writing process. A writer experiences moments of frustration many times throughout the writing process because it can be extremely difficult to capture one's thoughts on paper. A student has to learn how to handle those moments of frustration and discomfort with the writing process which occurs during the revising/editing process. However, some students do not know how to revise a problematic piece of writing, or to maybe even abandon a piece of writing if needed. The teacher must be able to recognize those students who will need additional support within the workshop in order to provide a rich and supportive learning environment for each and every student.

The workshop environment must also be set up in a manner that aids the students in the revising/editing process. A revising/editing center should be placed in an area of the classroom to which students have easy access; otherwise the students will not use the editing center. It is a good idea to place the editing center away from the area where the students write independently because when peer editing is occurring, students need to be able to talk and respond without worrying about disrupting a neighbor. Guidelines for using the editing center must also be provided for the students, as well as placed within the editing center, because students need to know what is expected of them at all times. Students will learn to become efficient editors and will also be able to revise their own work if the appropriate conditions and guidelines are taught to them within the Writers Workshop.

SHARING AND PUBLISHING

Sharing and publishing are essential within a Writers Workshop because when students share or publish their work for someone other than the teacher to read, they will begin to realize the power of writing. It is extremely hard for students to realize what writing can do and how powerful it can be if the only person who ever has the pleasure to read the writing is the teacher. Some students also have a really bad habit of solely writing for the teacher when writing is not shared or published because the writing does not have any other importance to them except through receiving a grade. Graves (1990) believes:

> Sharing helps writers to clarify content while hearing their own voice speak about the subject and hearing it come back to them through the class's response and

> questioning. When the other children ask questions and thus confirm a piece, writers learn what voice is. (p. 101)

Students must understand and learn to use their own voice within their writing. The only way students will discover and learn to use their own writing voice is through daily writing and feedback from peers, teachers, and other trusted adults.

Sharing and publishing can take many forms. Teachers and students can share their work with others via an overhead projector when editing a piece of writing and asking for suggestions. Writers may choose to read a piece of writing aloud to the class or a small group to look for audience reaction and ask for suggestions. An original piece of writing may be published on a bulletin board within the classroom. Writers may choose to publish their piece on the computer via a class or school website that other students can visit and peruse the published work. A teacher may decide to generate a class book or anthology of student writings. A student may also have a piece published outside of the classroom in a student magazine, newspaper, journals, or other publications that publish student writing (Murray, 1985, p. 191–192). Murray (1985) believes that the writing act is not complete until writers publish in some form. He states:

> Publication is a critical, essential step in the development of every writer. The writing act is not completed until the writer has received the response of readers to a draft. At that time connection is made with other human beings who bring their lives, their experience, and their needs into contact with the writer. (p. 190)

Students need other people, besides just the teacher, to read and respond to their writing. Different people have had different life experiences and will bring a different, and sometimes enlightening, perspective on a piece of writing just because their experiences

are different. When students have the opportunity to share their writing and express their reactions and feelings about another's piece, they will begin to behave and think like writers, not just students completing a writing assignment.

READING

Students must also read within the Writers Workshop in order to improve their writing. Students' vocabularies and use of conventions will increase through reading independently because the students will see how other authors write. Unfortunately, many students do not like to read and have no idea how to go about choosing something to read. Graves believes students have been taught to not enjoy reading because of their experiences in school. Graves (1990) states:

> Starting with our first days in school we have been conditioned to leave our own voices and our interpretations of texts at home. "What is the author saying?" "What does this mean?" From our first reading group in elementary school through our last graduate course, our teachers and professors have directed us in how to analyze the "text" of the author. They have already given us their interpretation of the text, and they want us to know it as precisely as they do. Make no mistake, the text is important, but the texts we create are also significant because they are the texts we live by. If we speak of the writer's voice, we also need to speak of the reader's voice. We read with a double awareness: this is what the author is saying; this is what I think. (p. 41-42)

Students have learned that their interpretations of a text are wrong because of previous experiences with teachers who did not allow for other views besides their own within the classroom. Reading is comprised of three elements: a reader's previous knowledge, the

author's words and meaning, and the meaning the reader takes from the text. Unfortunately, many students have not been taught that reading is an active process that involves the reader making sense of the words and the intended meaning of the author as the reading is occurring. Many students have been led to believe that there is only one correct interpretation, which obviously comes from the teacher, not the student.

Too many teachers rely on basal readers and textbooks to teach reading to students. However, very few basal readers contain the types of reading materials that students would choose to read on their own if they were given the freedom of choice. Many basal readers also do not offer selections with characters from different ethnicities, which means that many students' life experiences are not represented; therefore, many students will be unable to relate to the reading selections. Graves (1990) states:

> Basals are designed to deal with children's weaknesses rather than their strengths. Under these circumstances, each year there is less and less incentive for children to read on their own. Each basal is carefully structured to help children get ready for the *next* basal, when in fact, basals were originally created to free children to read trade books. (p. 51)

Many students have been conditioned to not only rely on teachers for writing topics, but also for reading interpretations because they have not been allowed to think for themselves. After all, they are just students, right? There is no possible way that they even know how to think without a teacher telling them how and when to think, let alone be trusted to choose their own reading and writing materials. Many schools and classrooms, in the past, were designed in this manner and some unfortunately continue to operate accordingly.

If students do not read for enjoyment, they will never write for enjoyment. Rather, their experience reading and writing will remain as something they do in order to receive a grade from a teacher. This has negative implications because the job of school and teachers is to help students become literate, lifelong learners. If the experiences students have in school are negative because they are not allowed to choose things to read and write, a love of learning will not be instilled. In order to help reluctant readers begin to discover things to read for enjoyment, teachers should have a variety of things for students to peruse within the classroom. The students' reading materials could include (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1990, 1994; Murray, 1985):

- A newspaper editorial
- The first two pages of a magazine article
- A poem
- The first two pages of a novel
- The beginning of a children's book
- The first two pages of a book the student owns and has always wanted to read, but has not read it yet.
- The beginning of a how-to article about something the student has always wanted to be able to do.
- A book the student doesn't want anyone else to know they are reading.
- A challenging book the student has always wanted to try to read.
- A book by an author the student has wondered about.

The students should simply look over the beginning of a reading piece in order to learn about the types of genres they may be interested in reading on their own. It may take

many different types of reading materials in order for some students to find something they are interested in reading completely. However, when individual students do finally discover a topic or genre they are interested in, he or she will read. Many students become insatiable readers when they finally learn that reading is enjoyable and intended to help the readers learn more about themselves and the world they live in.

It is also important that a teacher schedule Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time within the framework of the Writers Workshop. When students read independently, they will begin to discover their likes and dislikes as literate individuals. SSR allows students the opportunity to experience reading for enjoyment on a regular basis within the classroom as well as establishes the habit of reading for those students who are not used to reading for themselves. Teachers may find it difficult to schedule SSR time within the classroom, but this period of time is just as important as the Writing Workshop sessions. Hansen (1987) believes that the consistent scheduling of SSR is the most important factor when teaching students to become lifelong readers. She states:

> Time is precious. We don't want to waste it. We want our students to spend their time wisely. If we have to announce, "It's time for reading," we have yet to teach our students to start reading on their own. They still depend on us to initiate their reading process for them. Scheduling a consistent time to read enables students to get a book and read when reading begins each day. (p. 25)

Consistency is the key when scheduling SSR because teachers want students to simply get in the habit of reading. Elementary teachers may decide to schedule SSR during any time of the school day, but the important issue is to have reading time each day and at the same time so students will know and can depend on SSR as a time simply to read.

Secondary teachers have a more difficult time finding SSR time because of the time constraints they face with class schedules. However, middle and high school students also need a dependable block of time that is scheduled for SSR if they are going to become readers in the truest sense. For example, a teacher could schedule SSR for each class hour on Friday of each week. Students will eventually begin to initiate reading on their own without direction from the teacher when they learn that reading is for enjoyment and they are interested in what they are reading.

After SSR it is important that students, as well as the teacher, share some of the pieces they are reading with the class. This is also a great time for the teacher to introduce new titles, reading genres, or even to read favorite passages of text aloud to the class to demonstrate different types of writing (Graves, 1990). Students will begin to recognize different ways different authors approach writing, and learn new things to implement within their own writing. Reading is an important aspect of the writing process that helps students begin to behave and think like writers and teaches the tools students need to become lifelong literate individuals.

Reading is an act of empowerment. Reading another person's thoughts connects human beings so intimately and completely because we experience one another's lives through the simple act of reading words. Graves believes "reading and notions of power are closely related" (1990, p. 43). Reading can transform a person's thoughts, feelings, and ideas because a subject may be viewed in a different perspective. However, many students have not experienced an authentic act of reading solely for themselves. Most reading by students is done within the classroom because the teacher assigns it; very rarely do students actively pursue reading on their own just because they have a desire to

read. Reading for enjoyment is something that students will need in order to be successful writers. Some students come to school without ever experiencing the joy of being read to by a parent. Unfortunately, this implies that many children's first experiences they have reading are at school. It is a fact for many students that "the teacher is the one adult they encounter in their lives who has a questioning, literate engagement with the world" (Graves, 1990, p. 78). It becomes the job of the teacher to provide all students with positive reading and writing experiences that many students have yet to experience. Jane Hansen believes "what we do when we teach reading reflects our understanding of what we do when we teach writing" (1987, p. 17). It is important that the teaching of reading parallels the teaching of writing because the two disciplines are dependent upon each other. Many good readers can and will develop into good writers if the importance of both reading and writing is stressed within the Writers Workshop. If teachers do not instill a love of reading for enjoyment and continue to pick the reading selections for the students without ever inquiring about their individual interests, many students will never become lifelong readers and will continue the vicious cycle of a life void of reading and writing.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Donald Graves (1994) introduced the concept of actions in order to help teachers become more proficient teachers of writing. Graves defines an action as "something you do that helps you become an active teacher of writing" and he has developed a set of recommended actions that each teacher of writing can take in order to develop and maintain a sound writing program within the classroom (p. 5). Grave's actions represent the many different approaches to writing that many teacher-researchers have

implemented within their own writing programs and have come to believe are at the heart of what makes a great Writers Workshop.

The teaching relationship is one that is dependent upon both teacher and student participation. A teacher must learn to listen to the students in order to establish the trust between instructor and learner. If a student feels as if they have no choice within the classroom and their needs as a learner are not part of the teaching process, they will become withdrawn. Donald Graves (1990) interviewed different teachers concerning their teaching practices and evolvement as writing instructors. He wanted to elicit the practices that many teachers felt were the most important in learning to teach writing better. Graves learned that most teachers learned to listen to the students because they realized that without the students' thoughts, their teaching styles were not effective. After an interview with a teacher, referred to as Mary Ann, Graves states:

> Learning to listen meant that Mary Ann asked bigger questions in order to learn still more about what the children meant when they wrote and spoke. Gradually, as Mary Ann improved her listening literacy, she became more knowledgeable about what her children knew and how they knew it. Not only was she gathering firsthand information, she also wrote about what she was learning and shared her data at faculty meetings. Eventually she made presentations at national conventions. Her questions and the authority of her own information expanded her professional world. (p. 2)

An effective teacher reflects on the teaching practices that are utilized within the classroom on a daily basis. It is impossible for a good teacher to not take into account the students and their needs when making decisions about how and what to teach. Graves

(1990) refers to this practice as *mutual teaching* (p. 110). This means that the teacher teaches the content in the manner best suited for that specific teacher. If the teaching is not effective for the learner, the student must make the teacher aware of what is or is not working for him or her as the learner. This type of teaching style takes both the teacher's and students' needs into account, which is the basis of all learning. Graves (1990) believes that good teaching is based on "listening [which] is at the heart of learning for both children and teacher. Unless we listen we have no window on the world" (p. 83). Effective teachers of writing are effective because of their ability to listen to the students as well as themselves. A teacher needs to be aware of his or her own needs as an educator and learner, and combine those needs with those of the students. Teaching requires effective communication between the instructor and the student. In order to communicate effectively, both parties must listen and respect one another and be willing to try teaching and learning in a different manner. Graves (1994) believes that really listening to and learning from children relies on the following underlying principles:

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Learn what the child values about the event.
- Make sure you have interpreted the child accurately.
- And what will you do next [with the information]? (p. 19)

It will not benefit the student, or the teacher, if the information that the student provides is not taken seriously. A student must believe that their ideas and opinions are important and relevant to the teacher; otherwise the student will not be willing to trust the teacher. However, just listening to a child and not following through with the information is not good enough. The teacher must pursue a relationship based on trust and respect with the

child. For example, a teacher may write a comment such as "I watched it too!" about a specific television program the student writes about in the writing notebook. Instead of just reading the information, the teacher takes it one step further and establishes a connection to the student simply through validating the student's words. In order to do this a teacher must remember those aspects of a student's life that are especially important to that particular student. This relationship will help establish the framework for the Writers Workshop atmosphere.

The teacher must also make a conscious effort to observe the teaching methods that are being utilized within the workshop. In order to improve the environment of the Writers Workshop, a teacher may need to adjust the teaching methods to meet the needs of all of the students. Self-evaluation, when used effectively, will only improve an instructor's ability to meet the needs of each and every student within the workshop. A self-evaluation checklist is a great place to start for teachers who are beginning to evaluate their own teaching methods. A self-evaluation could include the following questions:

- Am I reading literature to my students every day?
- Am I providing time and choice daily for my students to read and write on self-selected books and topics?
- Am I noticing and commenting on what students are doing well and are able to do?
- Are students in my class excited about learning?
- Am I a happy and effective reading and writing model for my students?
- Am I taking the time to demonstrate and not just assigning?

- Are my questions allowing for varied responses and interpretations?
- Am I equally respectful of all students regardless of culture and background?
- Are my expectations high for all students?
- Do students know and understand how they will be evaluated or graded?
- Are my responses to students, both orally and in writing, specific and helpful?
- Am I using the "red pencil" sparingly, or not at all?
- Are children in my classroom feeling successful, regardless of their abilities?
- Do I provide regular opportunities for students to share and collaborate?
- Is the work students are doing meaningful and purposeful?
- Am I encouraging students to solve their own problems and take ownership of their learning?
- Am I providing opportunities for students to reflect on their progress?
- Are my evaluation procedures consistent with my philosophy and my teaching?
- Am I communicating effectively with parents and administrators? (Routman, 1994, p. 224b)

Checklists provide a teacher with a place to start when observing the teaching methods within the workshop. A teacher may also decide to videotape a few sessions of the Writers Workshop in order to gain a different perspective of what is occurring during the workshop session. Another approach a teacher may use is to have a co-teacher observe a workshop session or two and make notes about what is occurring as well as approaches that may need improvement. Journaling is also a great way for a teacher to think about teaching practices and the effects those practices may have on students. Even just listing the important attributes of teaching is an act of empowerment for the teacher simply

because when one takes the time to write something down, it suddenly takes on an air of importance. The act of writing, in and of itself, is an act of power because it gives the words on the paper validity in the world.

Observing the students while they are working within the workshop has to be a major component when deciding what types of recordkeeping the students will use. It is imperative that the teacher takes the students' needs into consideration when planning the activities for the workshop. Good instruction derives from observing students in action, then providing them with the tools that the students need at that time in order to progress as writers. When observation is used in accordance with planning the activities of the workshop, the students will excel as writers. Observation is one of the key ingredients of effective teaching because through observation a teacher collects data not only about the individual student, but also about the classroom and the effects that the classroom environment may have on individual students. When a teacher begins to actively think about classroom practices and procedures, both the teacher and the students will benefit greatly. However, a Writers Workshop has to be based in trust. A teacher must learn to trust the instincts of the students, as well as hold the students accountable for their independent writing, and if the students do not trust the teacher, a Writers Workshop will fail.

A Writers Workshop will also have its own set of rules and expectations. Atwell (1998) suggests the following list as a starting point for teachers interested in developing a Writers Workshop:

- Save everything: it's all a part of the history of the piece of writing, and you never know when or where you might want to use it.

- Date and label everything you write to help you keep track of what you've done (e.g., notes, draft #1, brainstorming).
- When a piece of writing is finished, clip everything together, including the drafts, notes, lists, editing checksheet, and peer-conference form, and file it in your permanent writing folder.
- Record every piece of writing you finish on the form in your permanent writing folder. Collect data about yourself as a writer, look for patterns, and take satisfaction in your accomplishments over time.
- Write on one side of the paper only and always skip lines or type double-spaced. Both will make revision, polishing, and editing easier and more productive for you.
- Draft your prose writing in sentences and stanzas. Draft your poems in lines and stanzas. Don't go back into a mess of text and try to create order. Format as you go.
- Get into the habit of punctuating and spelling as conventionally as you can *while* you're composing: this is what writers do.
- When composing on the word processor, print at least every two days. Then read the text with a pen in your hand, away from the computer, and see the work with the whole, rather then a part at a time on the screen.
- Get into the habit of beginning each workshop by reading what you've already written. Establish where you are in the piece and pick up the momentum.
- Understand that writing is thinking. Do nothing to distract me or other writers. Don't put your words into our brains as we're struggling to find our own.

- When you confer with me, use as soft a voice as I use when I talk to you; *whisper*.
- When you need to confer with peers, use a conference area and record your responses on a peer-conference form so the writer has a reminder of what happened.
- Maintain your proofreading list and refer to it when you self-edit.
- Self-edit in a color different from the print of your text and complete an editing checksheet to show what you know about conventions of writing
- Write as well and as much as you can. (p. 115-116)

A teacher may wish to revise the above list to fit the demands and the needs of the workshop, the students, and the instructor. A workshop needs a working set of rules and procedures in order to be effective and predictable. Rules, procedures, consequences and policies need to be posted in the classroom and available to students and their parents to peruse. Teachers may also want to have the students keep a copy of the school, classroom, and workshop procedures in their writing notebooks (see Appendix D). When students know the expectations and regulations of the classroom, the environment will nurture, not hinder, the writing process.

Teachers also need to write along with their students within the Writers Workshop. There are many teachers of writing who never actually write anything besides lesson plans and other items for school. However, a teacher must also be a writer if he or she is going to successfully teach writing to others. In order for students to learn how important writing is in order to be a literate individual, teachers must demonstrate writing for them. Graves believes "writing with your students is probably the single most powerful thing you will do to help them learn to write" (1994, p .42). Students of any

age learn best through direct instruction, observation and practice. In order for students to figure out how writers actually write, they need to observe a writer in action. Not only does this mean that teachers must write independently while the students are writing, it means that teachers must demonstrate what they are doing when they are in the process of writing. While discussing the high importance of teachers writing with students in the classroom, Graves states (1994):

> Since most of us associate writing with what schools have taught us about it, we lose out on learning about the purpose and place of writing for ourselves. Writing is a highly personal medium through which we communicate the facts and the meaning of our experience. The hard part is realizing that we actually have something to say. I've found that learning to write means first discovering where writing comes from, then seeing how it gets onto the page. (p. 36)

If teachers never write just for the sake of writing, discussions concerning writing and the writing process within the classroom will never be authentic. Teachers will be unable to convey the experiences writers have if they never have those experiences themselves. Murray is also in agreement with the notion that teachers need to write along with their students. Murray (1985) states:

> Teachers should write so they understand the process of writing from within. They should know the territory intellectually and emotionally: how you have to think to write, how you feel when writing. Teachers of writing do not have to be great writers, but they should have frequent and recent experience writing. (p. 74)

Teachers need a broad base of writing experiences in order to relate to the problems, concerns, triumphs and victories their students are beginning to experience as they learn

and grow as writers. The workshop environment demands that a teacher also be a writer in a community of maturing writers.

THE LEGACY OF WRITING WORKSHOP

A workshop approach for both reading and writing instruction is the approach that many teachers should consider using within their classrooms. A Writing Workshop grants both the teacher and the students freedom of choice within the classroom because the curriculum is based directly on the student's needs as readers and writers. Romano states: "Too often, writing instruction is designed not to set students free, but to shackle them, whip them into line, restrict their movement, make each like the other" (1987, p. 5). Many teachers of reading and writing rely on basal readers and textbooks because they are readily available and extremely easy to incorporate within the classroom. However, students do not learn by reading a selection, answering the pre-made questions at the end of the selection, and then responding to an essay question based on the selection. Unfortunately, this is the reality that many students face on a day-to-day basis the minute they enter the classroom.

The types of teaching methods in which the teacher assigns a topic, corrects the papers, hands them back for revision and re-submission do not teach the students how to write. The only thing students learn in that type of environment is to rely on the teacher for each step of the writing process, without ever thinking for himself or herself. Teachers are responsible for teaching writing to students. Unfortunately, the teaching of writing has been likened to other subjects, such as math, in which skills are taught, students memorize those skills through practice and daily instruction, and then the students are tested on those skills. Real, authentic writing is not a linear process with

skills that can be drilled and tested on a regular basis. There are rules and conventions that students must learn to use in their writing in order to be understood. However, those rules and conventions are learned best when students learn to use them on their own through working with them directly because they become a part of the student's grammar. This type of teaching only teaches the students to be passive, to not think for themselves, to not look for answers outside of the book or even the classroom, and to not care about what their own interests may be. This results in the passivity of many students who continue to rely on the teacher to tell them the "right" answer. The reality is that people, students and teachers alike, will all learn when personal interest, need, desire, and freedom of choice are present within the classroom.

The teacher is responsible for providing the type of environment in which all students, =regardless of ability levels, will succeed and grow as readers and writers. Graves (1990) states: "I never knew that teaching was simply a matter of letting children read, inquiring into their thinking, following their interests, allowing them to share with their classmates, and challenging and encouraging their dreams" (p. 80). Students need a teacher to guide them through the process of reading and writing, while granting them the privilege of choice as to what they read and write. There are standards and benchmarks that teachers are responsible for teaching the students during the school year. However, those standards and benchmarks are easily attainable within a workshop environment because they can be incorporated within the workshop format and curriculum as needed.

A Writers Workshop approach does require greater effort by both the teacher and the students; however, the effort only results in greater reading and writing improvement. The Writers Workshop environment frees both the teacher and the students from a

curriculum that does not consider the needs of the individuals within the classroom. Atwell (1998) believes that a Writers Workshop not only helps her students become better writers, but she continues to become a better teacher each year she implements a workshop within her classroom. She states:

> As long as I write and read, pay attention to who my kids are, and keep in touch with each writer's needs and intentions, there's a good chance I can avoid the worst of the orthodoxies – the maxims that prevent me from teaching my students what they need to know. I can be less caught up in adhering to a program or curriculum and more concerned with responding to my kids, leading them, and helping them grow up. (p. 26)

Many teachers are afraid to color outside of the lines. They fear the rejection they will face from co-teachers, administrators, parents, and even the students at first. It is hard to be different. It is hard to face rejection and people who are unwilling to give teachers a chance to improve not only their teaching practices, but also the way students learn within the classroom. Writers Workshop requires both the teacher and the students to be willing to teach and learn in a different manner than what has been occurring within many classrooms. Many adults do not trust children to make their own decisions regarding their learning. They may believe children are not wise enough, or mature enough, to handle the amount of responsibility that is required of them within a workshop environment. Children can and will make the kinds of decisions that will benefit their learning within the workshop if they are taught how to use their minds, interests, and needs as a catalyst for learning. Creating lifelong learners should be the primary goal of

all schools. The Writers Workshop, through its very nature, provides the type of environment to instill a love of reading and writing within each student.

Chapter Four – Data Collection / Methodologies

The methodologies I have decided to use in order to conduct the research of Writers Workshop within my classroom are based mostly on observation. It is highly important that teachers "continually observe students' interest and learning during instruction so that instruction can be adjusted to accelerate the students' learning as much as possible" (Rhodes & Dudley – Marling, 1996, p. 35). Observation is the key to understanding the elements of the classroom. The observation techniques I will use include:

- Field notes during the Writers Workshop sessions at least twice per week.
- Journal entries reflecting upon my thoughts and reactions to what occurred during the workshop, which I will review at least once per week, searching for any type of patterns.
- Videotapes of the workshop will be made at least three times during the course of my research. I will review the tapes, with notes and/or observations to aid my reflections.
- Anecdotal records to record each student's progress that day within the workshop.
- Methodological notes reflecting on the research practices I am incorporating into the workshop.
- Theoretical notes reflecting the theories I am researching compared to what I notice occurring within the workshop.
- Cooking notes (Hubbard & Power, 2003, p. 45) will be used to help aid my research and guide my thoughts and questions.

I will incorporate a variety of note taking because I need to look at the observations from as many different perspectives as possible. I believe it is highly important to not only take the field notes, but to also reflect upon them in order to gain a greater understanding of what is occurring within the workshop. It is also important to reflect upon the theories I am researching and trying to implement within my classroom because I need to see how the approaches I use are working or failing to work.

A student survey (see Appendix E) will also be used in order to see the Writers Workshop through the eyes of the students. I also plan to interview some students during the workshop sessions concerning different aspects of the writing process because I want to document how the students approach their writing. Student-teacher conferences will be used during the workshop sessions as another way to approach individual students. I am interested in looking at the students' perspective, as well as their approaches to writing, because it is highly important to my research to view the workshop through the students' eyes. There is no way to possibly understand how the students feel about the workshop without going directly to the source of my initial research question.

I will also collect writing samples (see Appendix F) during the course of the workshop to demonstrate the amount of effort and the quality of the writing, or lack thereof, the students are producing within the workshop. I hope the writing samples will shed some light on the amount of effort and motivation the students have concerning their writing. It is impossible to determine if the practices I am using within the workshop are effective if I do not review some of the students' writings.

The methodologies I will implement within my research are based on the direct observation of the students coupled with their perspectives of the workshop and the

effects it may have on their writing. I hope to gain a better understanding of how to help my students become more productive within the workshop and begin to behave and think like writers, not just write a page or two in their notebooks in order to fulfill their writing requirement for the class.

Chapter Five – Data Analysis

Throughout the course of the five-week marking period (January 26, 2004, until February 27, 2004) in which I conducted my research, I kept a teaching journal in which I wrote daily journal entries, field notes, anecdotal records, and the questions that all of my observations raised. I also videotaped the workshop sessions three times in order to aid my observations and provide a different perspective. When I perused my teaching journal and the videotapes, I discovered the following patterns:

- Most students approached their writing notebooks as journals, not as places to experiment with different writing genres.
- Many students did not use their writing time effectively within the classroom, yet managed to complete the required amount of writing.
- The students continued to rely on me, not themselves, for writing ideas and corrections.
- The students did not use the Reading Log and Writing Log (see Appendixes B and C) that were provided to them at the beginning of the school year.
- Many of the students stopped writing approximately halfway through the workshop sessions; some of the students did not work on their writing in any form for the entire workshop session.
- Many students seemed distracted or uncomfortable with the writing process and actively looked for ways to avoid writing within the classroom.
- The students did not display excitement for writing or reading within the workshop.

- Some students did not behave or think like writers because they failed to concentrate on their writing during the workshop.
- All of the students participated in some aspect of the workshop when they knew I was checking my class status sheet (see Appendix A). They were only working to pacify me, not because they had a desire to express their thoughts in writing.
- As soon as I finished checking my class status sheet, many students put their writing materials away.

I believe that the major problem that I had with the students and the questions that lingered in my mind long after they left my class concern the fact that the students did not utilize their time in class more effectively. The students had a hard time writing authentic pieces within the Writing Workshop. I also found it interesting that the students had such an easier time writing from a prompt compared to when I did not provide them with a topic, which was 90% of the time.

I still do not understand why it is so difficult for them just simply to write, especially when I have shown them how to brainstorm, make lists, and freewrite. My students continued to depend on me, the teacher, way too much for topics, corrections, answers, etc. during the course of the workshop. It is almost as if they have been conditioned to not think for themselves. When I asked them to think, many students withdrew and found completing or even attempting a task almost impossible. I want to know how to help my students become more responsible for their writing.

I also conducted an optional survey with my students because I wanted to receive some input from the actual writers. Sixteen students completed the survey and provided

insight into the facets of the Writers Workshop. The survey included the following questions:

1. Are you a writer?

   (If YES answer 2a, if NO answer 2b)

   - 88% (14 students) replied, "Yes."

2a. How did you learn to write?

   - The students responded that teachers helped them learn to write, practicing writing helped them learn, and they learned to write by reading and watching other people.
   - Jesse replied, "I taught myself by writing short stories and poems in elementary school."

2b. How do people learn to write?

   - People learn to write by writing daily, or keeping a diary or journal
   - 62% (10 students) chose not to answer the question.

3. Why do people write? List as many reasons as you can think of.

   - To relieve stress.
   - Because they are bored.
   - Because they love to write.
   - Because they feel free to express themselves.
   - To get away from reality.
   - To tell people how you feel.
   - To give examples of everyday life.
   - To tell others what they know.

- To teach something.
- For entertainment.
- Because they have to for work or school.
- One student wrote: "Paper is a best friend who doesn't tell secrets."
- Another student wrote: "It can sooth [sic] the soul."
- 44% (seven students) of the students believe the biggest deciding factor that motivates someone to write is to tell another person how you feel.

4. Think about your experience during the Writers Workshop – Has working in this type of environment helped you improve your writing in any way?
    - 100% (16 students) of the students believe that Writers Workshop has helped them improve as writers.
    - Curtis: "It helped me to write better by reading more books and writing more."
    - Mark: "It's helped me by encouraging me to just keep writing and write what you feel."
    - Florence: "It gave me courage and the ability to work harder. It has also given me ideas."
    - Jesse: "It made me confident to show my work."
    - Steve: "I feel as if I know how to make one little detail into one huge part in a story."
5. Did you find it difficult to choose your own writing topics? If so, why do you think it was difficult?
    - 81% (13 students) replied, "No, it isn't hard to find a topic."

- Angel referred to writer's block as "brain lock" that can sometimes make writing difficult.

6. Did you try any new type of writing during the course of the Writers Workshop?
    - 50% (eight students) replied "Yes."
    - 50% (eight students) replied "No."
7. Do you believe it is beneficial for students to write independently during class, or did you find that students wasted a lot of the writing time?
    - 62 % (10 students) believe students wasted writing time
    - 100% (16 students) believe that writing independently within the class is good.
8. Did you feel that you did not have a lot of guidance during the Writers Workshop (i.e. was it hard for you to be responsible for monitoring and finishing your work without turning it in on a daily basis)?
    - 81% (13 students) replied, "No, it wasn't difficult."
    - 19% (three students) found it difficult, especially keeping track of their writing.
    - Angel wrote: "There was enough guidance because not telling us what we have to do all the time is teaching us responsibility."
9. In general, how do you feel about what you write?
    - Catherine: "I feel that my writing means something to me because sometimes it can be really personal.
    - Nate: " I feel satisfied with what I have written and I feel more confident about my writing ability."

- Florence: "What I feel about what I write is satisfied and confident because a lot of the things I write are things from experience or things that are on my mind good or bad. Overall, I just have a really strong passion for writing."
- Candi: "I feel like writing is a giant puzzle; you start with one piece and work your way until it's a finished masterpiece."

10. How could the Writers Workshop be more productive for each individual writer within the class? List as many suggestions that you can think of.
    - 81% (13 students) did not suggest anything to improve.
    - One student suggested more writing days.
    - One student suggested more time to share their writing with the class.
    - One student suggested publishing a class book.

The results of the survey indicated that many students like the Writers Workshop. However, their work habits do not mirror their responses, or the observations that I made during the course of my workshop session. I believe that many of my students were providing me with answers that they thought I would like, even though I asked them to be honest with me.

The class status log that I used to check the students' writing progress during the course of the workshop sessions only reiterated the conclusions I have drawn concerning the student's approach to writing. The students continued to work diligently while I made my way through the class checking with individual writers. As I circled around the room meeting with writers at their desks, I began to notice many of the students with whom I had already checked stopped writing. When I finished and put my clipboard

away in order to begin writing myself, many of the students had already put away their writing materials. I do not understand why the students only continue to write when there is a threat present. I hate feeling like the writing police. I want all of my students to enjoy writing and experience the power of the written word.

I collected the students' writing notebooks at the conclusion of the five-week research period. I found the following patterns throughout the notebooks:

- Many students are simply writing journal entries. I rarely found attempts at other types or genres of writing.
- Very few students revised or edited any of their pieces within the notebooks.
- Only a few pieces throughout each student's notebook were completed pieces ready for publication; however, those finished pieces did not have editing marks or sheets completed for the piece.
- The students are not using the Reading and Writing Logs in their notebooks; many students no longer even have them placed in the front of the notebook.
- There were very few examples of peer editing or conferencing within the notebooks; I did not find any notations or conferencing sheets within the notebooks.

The students are not behaving or thinking like writers. The behaviors I observed within the Writers Workshop, as well as the writing the students produced within their writer's notebooks, are not representative of the expectations I have for my students. I expect my students to spend more time in class working on their writing as well as push themselves as writers by attempting genres that they have not tried within their writing notebooks.

The students submitted completed short stories for publication in a class book. I found it quite interesting because the stories the students submitted were good; however, many of the stories were not written or even worked on within the Writers Workshop. The class-status log does not correspond with the stories the students submitted which leads me to believe that they are not comfortable writing in my classroom. I believe the writing environment, coupled with the procedures that I have not instituted within my classroom, is responsible for the lack of performance within the workshop by my students.

Chapter Six – Reflections

The Writers Workshop research I have conducted has lead me to the following conclusions:

1. The students are not behaving or thinking like writers.
2. The students do not feel a personal responsibility for their writing.
3. The workshop environment has not been designed to aid the students in the writing process.

The observations I made while researching my students within the Writers Workshop reveal that my students are not actively engaged in the writing process. The students are writing simply to pacify me because they view me, the teacher, as the one who has the power within the classroom. A writing community in which all writers are equal has not been established within my classroom. I believe the lack of student use of the Reading and Writing logs has established the power dynamic that exists between my students and me because I am the one who is marking a check next to the student's names on my class-status sheet.

The students did not use the Reading and Writing Logs because they were not held accountable for them. There was not a system in use that required the students to get into the habit of using the logs, which resulted in this failure. I did not give the students a separate grade for the use of the logs within their writer's notebooks. I was hoping the students would just fill them out and continue to use them without any additional prodding or support. I believe the students would begin to use the records if I made them accountable for using them by placing a grade on their use. It is obvious to me now that the students do need additional support from me in order to get them into the habit of

using the records to aid each individual student's writing process. In the future, a weight must be placed on the student logs in order to hold the students accountable for tracking their own progress as readers and writers within the workshop. I took too much responsibility for each student's work through the use of the class-status sheet instead of placing that responsibility with the students themselves. There was no way the students would view the logs as important when I did not provide the conditions to aid the students in seeing the relevance of self-evaluation as part of the writing process. There is a direct correlation between the expectation of responsibility that I hold for my students and the amount of responsibility they actually take for their writing. The conditions I have placed within my classroom have actually had the reverse effect of what I was hoping to instill within my students. I am responsible for the student's continued reliance on me, as well as their lack of responsibility concerning their writing, as the figure of power within the Writers Workshop simply because I have continued to perpetuate the conditions that my students have become accustomed.

In the future, the students will use the Reading and Writing Logs because I will place a grade on their use. I believe this will help the students because they will be required to take responsibility for tracking their own progress as a writer and reader as a part of their overall grade. I will not continue to base the daily participation grade on the class-status sheets because I need to place the responsibility of writing and staying on task with the students, not with me. I believe that the use of records will dramatically change the writing environment that now exists within my classroom.

APPENDIX A
CLASS – STATUS SHEET

STUDENT	TOPIC	DATES				
		2 / 2	2 / 3	2 / 4	2 / 5	2 / 6
Jerome	Journaling	D	D	D	NW	TC
Nate	Short Story	D	D	TC	E	R
Chris	Rap	A	D	R	D	D
Brian	Short Story	D	D	E	EP	D
Curtis	Journaling	D	A	NW	NW	A
Kevin	Journaling	D	D	NW	NW	A
Florence	Journaling	D	D	D	D	D
Quanisha	Journaling	A	NW	TC	E	D
Candi	Journaling	D	D	NW	D	TC
Jesse	Journaling	D	D	D	E	R
Catherine	Short Story	A	D	D	D	D
Jodi	Journaling	D	D	A	TC	D
Angel	Journaling	PC	D	D	E	TC
Patricia	Journaling	PC	D	A	D	TC
David	Journaling	TC	D	D	NW	D
Mark	Journaling	D	TC	A	E	R
Steve	Short Story	D	TC	D	EP	R
Morgan	Journaling	D	NW	NW	D	TC

Codes:
P - Prewriting
D – Drafting
PC – Peer Conference
TC – Teacher Conference
E – Self – Editing
EP – Partner – Editing
R – Revision
F – Final Copy
NW – No Work
A - Absent

APPENDIX B
STUDENT WRITING RECORD

Pieces of Writing Finished by _____

DATE	TITLE	GENRE	EDITED

This is a replica of the Student Writing Record that the students were given at the beginning of the Writers Workshop. The students were supposed to place the records in the front of their notebooks and fill them out after editing and finishing a piece in order to have completed pieces ready for submission into the class book. Unfortunately, the students failed to use the records and many students did not even have a copy available in their notebooks.

APPENDIX C
STUDENT READING RECORD

Books Read by _____

DATE	TITLE	AUTHOR	GENRE	# OF PAGES READ

This is a replica of the Student Reading Record that was intended to be filled out by the students during SSR in order to track their independent reading. The students did not use the record and many students no longer even had them within their writing notebooks.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITES WITHIN THE WRITERS WORKSHOP

The following list includes the things you, the student, are responsible for during the course of the Writers Workshop. Please keep this posted within the front of your notebook at all times.

- Maintain a writing notebook in which you will keep all of your work.
- Bring your notebook to class each day.
- Come to class each day prepared to write or work on a piece of writing.
- Find and develop writing topics.
- Be willing to try new and different types of writing.
- Accept the responsibilities of completing pieces.
- Be willing to work with and support your peers during editing and revision.
- Behave properly and follow all school and classroom rules.
- Do not disturb other writers.
- Grow and progress as a writer.

APPENDIX E

Student Survey – Writers Workshop

1. Are you a writer?
   (If YES answer 2a, if NO answer 2b)

2a. How did you learn to write?

2b. How do people learn to write?

3. Why do people write? List as many reasons as you can think of.

4. Think about your experience during the Writers Workshop – Has working in this type of environment helped you improve your writing in any way?

5. Did you find it difficult to choose your own writing topics? If so, why do you think it was difficult?

6. Did you try any new type of writing during the course of the Writers Workshop?

7. Do you believe it is beneficial for students to write independently during class, or did you find that students wasted a lot of the writing time?

8. Did you feel that you did not have a lot of guidance during the Writers Workshop (i.e. was it hard for you to be responsible for monitoring and finishing your work without turning it in on a daily basis)?

9. In general, how do you feel about what you write?

10. How could the Writers Workshop be more productive for each individual writer within the class? List as many suggestions that you can think of.

APPENDIX F
STUDENT WORK

Short Story

There was this young girl named Alice. Everyone knew her, she was one of the friendliest little girls around! Everyone's parents loved her because she is so sweet and kind to anyone and everyone! Her birthday had just passed about 2 in a half weeks ago, she just turned 8 years old! School was just getting out for the summer. She loved the summer because she could hang out with all of her friends and have lots of sleepovers! One night her brother Tim had his friend Mark stay the night. For some reason Mark wanted to sleep in Alice's room. When she finally went of to sleep, Mark went into her room, shut the door and locked it and took off his shirt and then his pants, and he got into the bed. Alice turned over to see who it was that was in her bed, and as she turned around he grabbed her and started feeling on her, she didn't know what to do, so she just laid there! A few minutes later he started to take off her cloths! First he took off her shirt then he took off her pants then he took off her under cloths! She was so scared that she started to cry! She tried to push him away but that only made it worse! He got on top of her and she started to scream so then he put his hand over her mouth and continued doing what he was doing! About 20 minutes later he was finished! HE got up and put his cloths back on, and unlocked the door and left! Alice then realized that she was just raped!! She was to scared to move! The next day she saw him walking down the street, so she ran and she ran as fast and as far as she could get from him.

The End

By: Christina Perkins

Joyride – Page 1

It was three weeks into summer vacation; my freshman year of high school had just ended. So far the summer was an embarrassment. There we were, Keanen and I sitting in JeRon's family room, looking like three pitiful souls with our eyes half shut, eating junk food and watching music videos. This is not how I planned to spend the rest of my summer.

We wanted to do something that was more thrilling, more risky. Something that would push the envelope further than anything we would ever dream of doing together. We never thought we would envision something that would give us regrets later in life, but this was exactly the case.

After about fifteen minutes of thinking, we shared our thoughts with each other. My idea was for all of us to try skydiving, and we agreed it was not such a bad idea. JeRon's idea was to take a road trip, where we would all pick a place to drive to and go, but we agreed that was not thrilling enough, so we said no to that. Keanen's plan was to take a joy ride for a night.

JeRon and I looked at each other with an obtuse look on our faces as we asked Keanen what he meant by his idea. He replied, "We borrow a car". JeRon and I uneasily asked him, "Borrow a car?" Keanen easily replied, "Yes, let's steal Mrs. Edgar's car tonight and have some fun with it." Right away, JeRon and I swallowed down the guilt to ease the pressure in going through with it.

As a last conscience effort, we laughed at the idea, as if he we're joking, but Keanen kept a motionless face. I knew by how silent he became, and the stern look in his eyes, that he was dead serious. He talked JeRon and I into it and made the whole scheme sound innocent. Though I had doubts in the back of my mind, I didn't say a word. So right there, in JeRon's family room, we all made a pact, that whatever happened that night would stay between us, forever.

The next two hours were spent on the internet doing research on how to hotwire an automobile. We finally came across an underground website that gave us detailed instructions and diagrams on how to accomplish our goal. The more time I spent thinking through the plan we conjured, the more I wanted to go through with it.

After printing out the instructions and reading over them, I understood them better than JeRon and Keanen, so we agreed I would do the hotwiring. We took a walk to Mrs. Edgar's home, which was only about eight blocks from JeRon's home. We surveyed the house to see if there were any type of alarm system on the premises or the car itself, and to our amazement there was not. Fortunately for us, Mr. Edgar would be at work at our agreed starting time, and Mrs. Edgar, being a teacher, would surely

be in bed at this hour on a weekday. We than took a closer look at the car. A black 2003 Mitsubishi Eclipse with gray leather interior and brand new rims that glistened like diamonds in the sunlight. The body of the car was lowered, making it inches from the ground, all windows had "shadow" tinting.

We decided a second time that we would steal the car at midnight, as we would have all night to play with it, with the likeliness that no one would report it stolen. It turned out to be a gloomy night with a full moon. We all dressed in black with gloves to avoid fingerprint trails just in case. We arrived at Mr. and Mrs. Edgar's house around 12:05. After placing JeRon and Keanen to keep a lookout, I slowly stuck an unfolded hanger into an opening in the car window and got the door unlocked. I began to hotwire the car immediately while the others still kept watch, ironically, Keanen and JeRon were both obviously nervous, as my adrenaline was flowing enough to block out anything else.

After two minutes, which seemed like two hours to the others, the car was started and good to go. After backing out, I got out of the car and walked to Mr. and Mrs. Edgar's driveway to JeRon and Keanen's amazement. I proceeded to kneel down and draw a smiley face in green neon chalk on their black topped driveway; my trademark.

As more adrenaline started to flow through my veins, I floored it and drove like a madman onto the city streets, you could here me coming from a mile away by the roar of the engine and the screeching of the tires. My eyes were wandering the streets, and my hands we're steady on the wheel. My heart was beating a mile a minute, if not faster. It was a total adrenaline rush. I pulled into the parking lot of Flint Central High School, turned the stereo all the way up, put in a System of a Down CD, and got out of the car, for it was JeRon's turn to play with the car. He proceeded to entertain Keanen and I by doing doughnuts in the parking lot. After about ten minutes we got out of the car to survey the damage we had done to the parking lot.

To our amazement, JeRon had left huge black rings, that looked like little crop circles. You could smell burnt rubber from the tires and all the smoke still hovering in the air. With some common sense I still possessed, I felt bad about what we had just done to the parking lot, and thought of the fury that the school administrators would surely have the next school morning.

After JeRon's turn was down, he got out and waved me into the driver's seat as it was now my turn. I drove around and pulled up next to a red Honda Civic at a stoplight. I glanced over to JeRon next to me in the passenger seat and beamed a relaxed smile at him and turned to the stoplight, waiting and feeling for it to turn green. The light turned green, both cars skidded out. The front end of our car went up and the back end dropped, with the desire to beat the civic.

I looked over to JeRon as he was staring at me in amazement. Whenever we brought this story up amongst ourselves, he always elaborated on the determination and willpower, and the look in my eyes during that drag race. I was interested in how fast we were going; the speedometer broadcasted 170 mph. I stared at the speedometer, telling it in my mind to go faster. We pulled away from the civic and won the race after we shot like a bullet across an intersection on a yellow light.

It was a quarter until two. We all had the munchies so we decided to stop at the nearest Taco Bell. All three of us sat down outside on a table taking in the moment with stirring looks on our faces, sharing our secret between us, the stars, and the moon. We were speechless, the only noises came from the hard shell tacos we were eating. Now it was Keanen's turn to drive.

We slowly drove out of the parking lot of Taco Bell and headed for the freeway. We got onto the on ramp and only a few cars shared the road with us, Keanen hit the breaks in the middle of the freeway and we asked, "What the hell are you doing you stupid moron?!" He looked around the freeway and saw no traffic, so he glanced back to the road ahead. Out of nowhere, Keanen floored it and JeRon and I were sucked to the back of our seats, hoping Keanen knew what he was doing. We noticed traffic up ahead and JeRon looked over to me, we both had the same expression on our faces that read, "We're in deep shit now." Keanen began to weave in and out of ongoing traffic, he was going well over 135 m.p.h. Keanen seemed to be losing all control, as he began to hysterically laugh, like a madman.

Before he killed us all, JeRon persuaded Keanen to slow down and head back to Mr. and Mrs. Edgar's home. Keanen agreed to JeRon's relief and headed back. On the way back, we stopped at a red light at an intersection. A cop pulled up beside us and stared at us dubiously. The adrenaline caught up with us and we were back to reality, as we were all nervous now. I whispered to them not to make eye contact with the cop as he might see it in our eyes. After he passed us, which seemed like a snail pace, JeRon thanked God out loud.

Twenty minutes later, we arrived at Mr. and Mrs. Edgar's street and turned off the headlights. We slowly parked the car in their driveway exactly where it was. As I got out of the car I noticed my trademark still sketched on to the black top and took some pride into what I had done. On the way back to JeRon's house, JeRon and I looked at Keanen. Ironically again, he appeared very guilty about what we had done as JeRon and I had the time of our lives. After arriving back to JeRon's family room, we all sat down and relaxed silently. I broke the silence with six words the three of us will always remember.

"So what do we do now?"

*A WIDOWS * * STORY *

In New York, a lady by the name of Laura Johnson in a news paper business was walking around the hustle bustle of everyone trying to keep everything on schedule. She breathed in the smell of ink and burnt paper all too familiar to her. She has worked here for 5 years now, and knows the place like the back of her hand. She dreamed though, that someday she will be a reporter with the very best of stories that people want to read. Then one day, a lady came to her at Laura's work. "Laura Johnson? Hi, I'm sally trimmings. I have an offer you can't refuse." Said a short, blonde lady, shaking Laura's hand in excitement. Laura smiled. "What can I do for you?" asked Laura. "Well... can we discuss this over some coffee? My treat." Said sally. Laura nodded in agreement and grabbed her coat.

Out side, Laura watched the taxi's drive around picking up and dropping off their customers. Sometimes she would watch them from her apartment window and count them before she would go to bed.

At the coffee house, sally smiled and took a sip of her coffee. "Well?" asked Laura nervously. "I came to offer you a job as a reporter. All you have to do is get this as a really great story and your in" said sally. Laura couldn't believe it! Her dream has finally come around to her. "I'll do it!" said Laura jumping up "Great there's a catch, you have to travel to Houston, Texas for your first assignment," said Sally. "Okay I'll catch the train right away," said Laura. Sally gave Laura the address and was off.

As Laura practically flew to her apartment she ran into a guy, "Hey watch where your going bud!" she screamed but then looked into the guy's eyes. "Sorry ma'am" he said tipping his hat and walking off. Laura was scuffing her feet as she turning red.

She had gotten home and petted her York Terrier and started to pack. "Woof" said Scruffy. "What do you want?" asked Laura while packing her things. "Woof" said Scruffy once again and merrily wagging his stub of a tail. Laura shook her head saying "Silly boy!" As soon as she got to the train station a guy stood there. She immediately recognized him from the guy she had ran into earlier today. "Howdy ma'am I am here to take you to my grandmothers house, Mrs. Abigal Washington's house" Laura gasped. "Alright, Tom, lets go then," she said unsurely. The train ride there was relaxing. Laura noticed that this could be her best shot at being a reporter so she vowed she will not screw it up. She glanced out the window. The country side and feel were strange to her and she almost missed her busy city life while the country was carefree.

Finally they arrived. The house was huge. The porch seemed to go on for miles on end. It was a blue and yellow house that looked almost like a painting. Laura fell in love with it. Then a weird smell came to her nose. " Oranges," said Tom aloud as if he read her mind. She nodded. Then she noticed a swing on a tree that looked like no one has swung on it for ages. They went around the back as Tom went inside to find his Grandmother. Laura spotted a rose bush and smelled the flowers. She sighed like a school girl who had a secret crush. Then Laura heard a voice. " Come child, over here, under an orange tree." Said a soft old voice in a low hum. Laura followed the voice. She walked through the orange grove that seemed endless. The sun bounced off the oranges and a warm light breeze swept through Laura's hair.

" Mrs. Washington?" asked Laura as she found a small old lady that actually looked young for her age. Her flowing white hair and not a lot of wrinkles on her face either. " Yes that's me, child. Come over here and sit down. You must be the reporter." Laura smiled at that. She liked being called a 'Reporter'. Laura looked into Abigal's eyes. They were blue just like Thomas's and no doubt that he was related to her. Laura took out her pen and pad of paper to write notes down.

" Once, long ago.. I lived with my father on an old orange grove farm in a small farm house. I was just a small girl. One day my father became ill....."

******* The Year 1910******

it was a warm summer day as little abby ran around chasing a little chipmunk. A strange man walked up the road. Abby stopped and stared at the man. He wore dark clothing and his face not happy at all. He went inside her house. She heard a cry as her father fell dead on the ground. Abby was so scared she ran away as fast as her little legs could carry her.

As soon as she realized she was lost in the deepest depths of the woods. " daddy!" she cried alone. " don't let me be all alone! I'm so scared!"

A little boy heard her cries and went to see what was wrong with the girl. " are you Ok?" he asked. " No, my daddy is..is...DEAD!" cried abby. " oh, my daddy is dead too, some strange man came to our house and my mom made me run.... My names Erin Washington." The boy said. " I'm Abby Willow."

Years went by as Erin build a house for the two of them to stay in. the fell in love soon enough and got married.

******Present Time******

"as you see, they were hard times back then and now they are easier with all the new inventions. He died back in 1990 but his soul still remains in this house." Said Abigal " and i now feel it is time for me to pass on as well". Laura looked shocked for only a moment but then realized that living alone for 10 years isn't exactly fun. Laura looked at Tom and smiled. Since she had gotten too know him better she had started to like him for who he was. " you love him don't you?" said Abigal slyly. Laura blushed. "Um sort of, well, yeah i guess i do" said Laura. " he is found of you too" said abigal. Tom came over. "Alright Grams, time for bed."

In the morning, Laura smiled as she stretched. She had heard a rooster crow for the first time.

Tom went in to get his grand mother up for breakfast but she had past away late last night. "I'm so sorry Tom," Sighed Laura. "Its alright, she knew she was going, but not as.....what's this?" said Tom picking up a neatly folded piece of paper. He opened it and read it aloud.

Dear Tom,

I'm so happy that you finally brought a women home for me to meet. She was a very nice girl and I wish that I could gotten to know her a little better. I am going to leave to you my house and all my belongings because you are the only living relative that still is living. Thank you so much for the kindness you have shown me.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Abigal Washington

Oh tom was so sad to read that letter aloud. Laura ran to him and kissed him to assure him everything's still alright. " she will always be here for you in your heart" said Laura.

Years passed and tom and Laura got married. They had 3 kids and lived in Toms grandmothers house that she left to him. Laura was a famous reporter, only because she came out with the most spectacular story ever. The one called:

A Widows Story

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